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ABSTRACT

This report evaluates the Early Alert program at Cuesta College (California). The report is divided into four main sections: services accessed, accessibility, actions taken as a result of receiving an Early Alert letter, and timing and utility of the Early Alert program. These are followed by the demography of the respondents, a brief background describing the Early Alert process, and the survey instrument employed. The Early Alert Program was designed to notify Cuesta College students of potential academic problems early in the semester. Whereas in 1999 a larger proportion of respondents indicated having met with their instructors than in 1998, smaller proportions of respondents in 1999 indicated having used the various tutorial services and labs available than did respondents in 1998. The percentage of respondents in 1999 who indicated that, as a result of receiving an Early Alert letter, they had withdrawn from the course for which the Early Alert was received rose 14.6 percentage points from 1998 to 1999. Similarly, as a result of receiving an Early Alert letter, a larger percentage of respondents "studied more" in 1999 than in 1998. However, in 1999 very few additional actions, such as seeking tutoring or joining study groups, were taken compared with 1998. Finally, respondents indicated significantly higher levels of satisfaction with both the timing of the receipt of the Early Alert letter and the overall utility of the program. (VWC)

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Evaluation of the Early Alert Program –*Spring 1999*

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Research Report No. 98/99-06

Matriculation and Research Services

JC 000 384

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EARLY ALERT SURVEY (1998 VS 1999)

Executive Brief

In February 1995, the state Chancellor's office evaluated Cuesta College's Matriculation program. One of the recommendations of the visiting technical assistance team was to evaluate the effectiveness of the Early Alert program. Accordingly, two research studies have been conducted; one of which has been administered twice. The first looked at the utility of the Early Alert information from the college's point of view. In general, a number of departments do make use of the data mentioned in Appendix 1 (page 7)—EOPS, financial aid, counseling, DSPS, etc.

The second study analyzed the utility of the Early Alert program from the student's perspective. The survey on which this report is based was first administered in January 1998. The identical one-page, 18-question, scannable survey was sent to 1793 students who received an Early Alert letter during the Spring 1999 semester. In all, 142 surveys (or 8% of the Spring 1999 Early Alert population) were complete enough to include in the current analysis.

The report is divided into four main sections (corresponding to the four sections of the survey), followed by the demography of the respondents, a brief background describing the Early Alert process (Appendix 1), and the survey instrument employed (Appendix 2).

Four observations are noteworthy. First, Figure 1 (page 2) illustrates that, whereas in 1999 a larger proportion of respondents indicated having met with their instructors than did in 1998 (43.0% vs. 37.5%), smaller proportions of respondents in 1999 indicated having used the various tutorial services and labs available than did respondents in 1998.

Second, and perhaps most important, the percentage of respondents in 1999 who indicated that, as a result of receiving an Early Alert letter, they had withdrawn from the course for which the Early Alert was received rose 14.6 percentage points from 19.2% in 1998 to 33.8% in 1999. Similarly, a comparison of other actions taken as a result of receiving an Early Alert letter, demonstrates that in 1999 a larger percentage of respondents "studied more" than in 1998 (19.7% vs. 13.4%). However, in 1999 very few additional actions (e.g., sought tutoring, accessed library, joined study group, etc.) were taken compared to those taken in 1998.

Finally, respondents indicated significantly higher levels of satisfaction with both the timing of the receipt of the Early Alert letter and the overall utility of the program. Specifically, with respect to timing, 70.5% of respondents in 1999, compared to 51.8% in 1998, felt that the Early Alert letter was 'timed about right." Further, the percentage of students indicating that the Early Alert letter is useful increased 11% percentage points to 83% in 1999 from 72% in 1998.

EARLY ALERT SURVEY (1998 vs 1999)

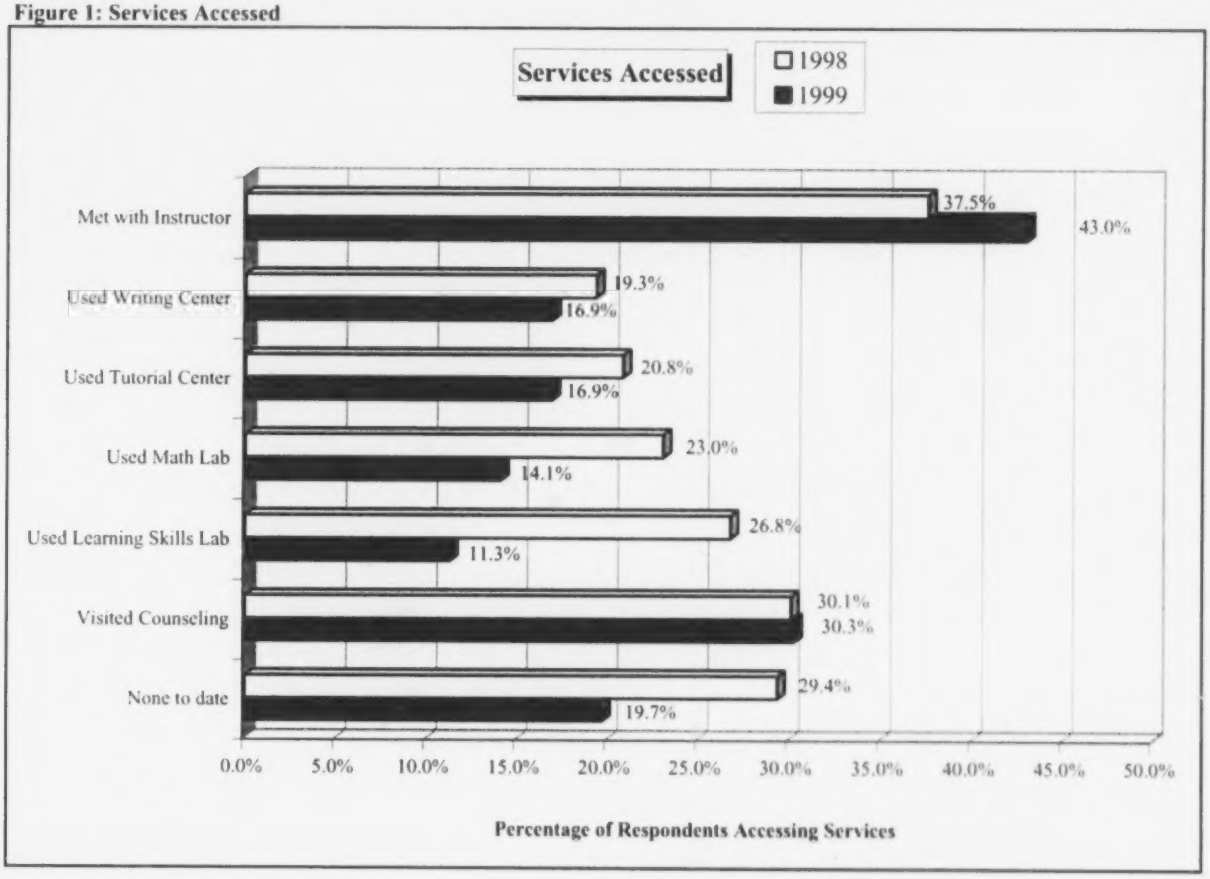
Section 1: Services Accessed

In Section 1 of the Early Alert survey students were asked to indicate which services, if any, they used as a result of receiving an Early Alert letter. Table 1 delineates students' responses in terms of frequency and percentage. The Respondents column represents the sample size of respondents to each question. The figures in the column "Accessed Service" represent the number of respondents who indicated using a respective service as a result of receipt of an Early Alert letter. The "Percent Accessed" column, then, is representative of the ratio of the number of students accessing a particular service to the total number of students responding to the survey. For example, in 1998, 101 students out of 269 respondents or 37.5% indicated they had met with their classroom instructor to discuss their classroom performance as a result of receiving an Early Alert letter. Figure 1 contrasts the percentage of respondents accessing each service for 1998 and 1999.

Table 1: Services Accessed

Services	Respondents		Accessed Service		Percent Accessed	
	1998	1999	1998	1999	1998	1999
Met with Instructor	269	142	101	61	37.5%	43.0%
Visited Counseling	269	142	81	43	30.1%	30.3%
Used Learning Skills Lab	269	142	72	16	26.8%	11.3%
Used Math Lab	269	142	62	20	23.0%	14.1%
Used Tutorial Center	269	142	56	24	20.8%	16.9%
Used Writing Center	269	142	52	24	19.3%	16.9%
None to date	269	142	79	28	29.4%	19.7%

Figure 1: Services Accessed



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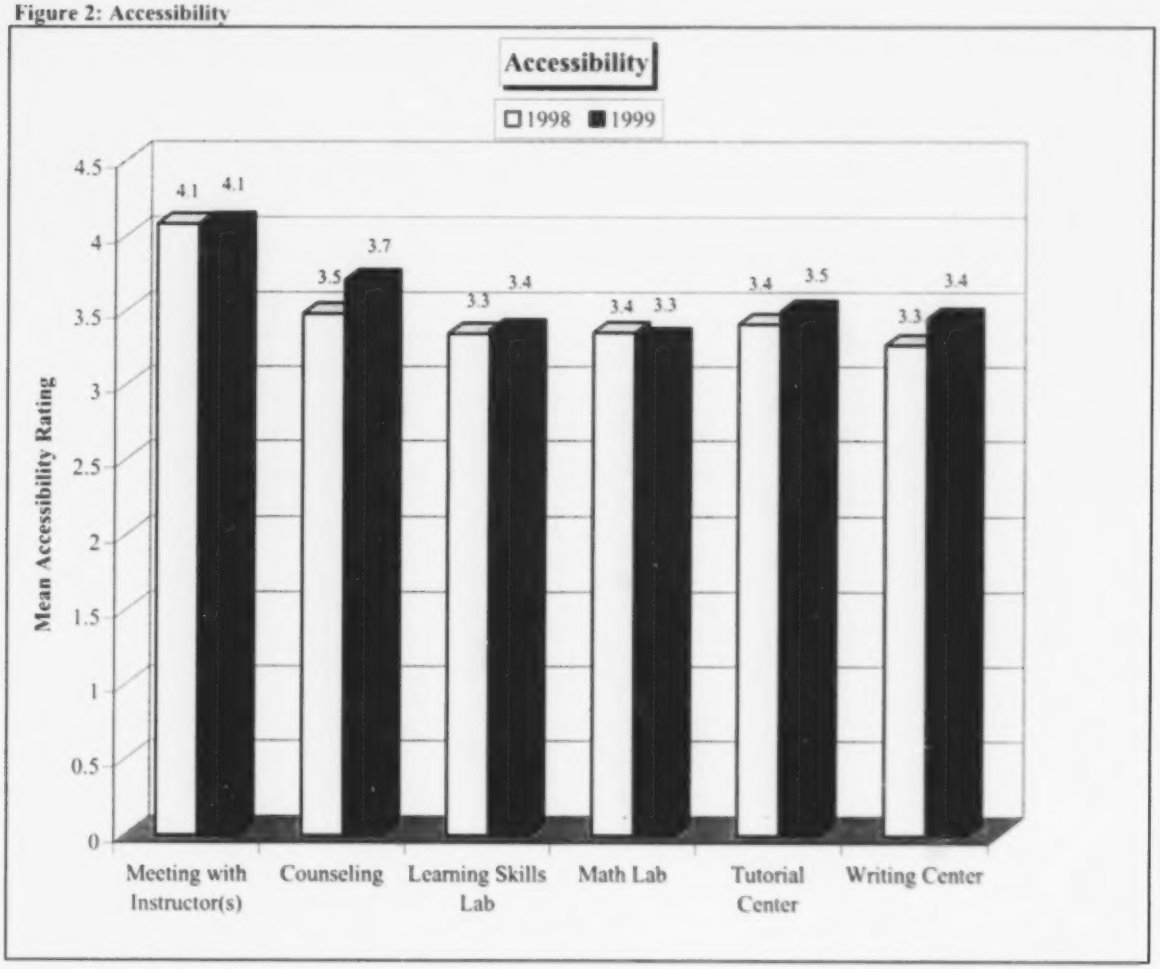
EARLY ALERT SURVEY (1998 vs 1999)

Section 2: Accessibility

Section 2 of the survey requested that students rate the accessibility of the services mentioned in Section 1. A Likert scale ranging from *Extremely difficult to use (1.0)* to *Extremely easy to use (5.0)* was employed as a means of gauging the ease with which students could use each service. Each possible answer corresponds to a numerical value between 1 and 5 where 1 is *Extremely difficult to use* and 5 is *Extremely easy to use*. As an example, in Figure 2 below, the 1998 bar shows a mean score of 4.1 in the case of "Meeting with Instructor," which indicates that, in general, students regarded this service as easy to use. Independent sample t-tests indicated no significant ($p<.05$) differences between 1998 and 1999 mean accessibility scores, indicating that all of the services shown were relatively easy to use.

Figure 2: Accessibility



EARLY ALERT SURVEY (1998 vs 1999)

Section 3: Actions Taken as a Result of Receiving an Early Alert Letter

This section of the survey explored the effects of receiving an Early Alert letter on students' decisions to continue or withdraw from courses (Figure 3). In addition, students were also provided the opportunity to list, in an open-ended format, other actions taken as a result of receiving an Early Alert letter (Figure 4). From Figure 3 it is clear that, as a result of receiving an Early Alert letter, a greater proportion of respondents withdrew from courses in 1999 than did in 1998. Moreover, Figure 4 shows that in 1999 a greater proportion of respondents indicated having studied more as a result of receiving an Early Alert letter than did those in 1998. However, the figure also shows that respondents in 1998 engaged in a greater diversity of actions than did respondents in 1999.

Figure 3: Course Withdrawals by Students Receiving an Early Alert Letter

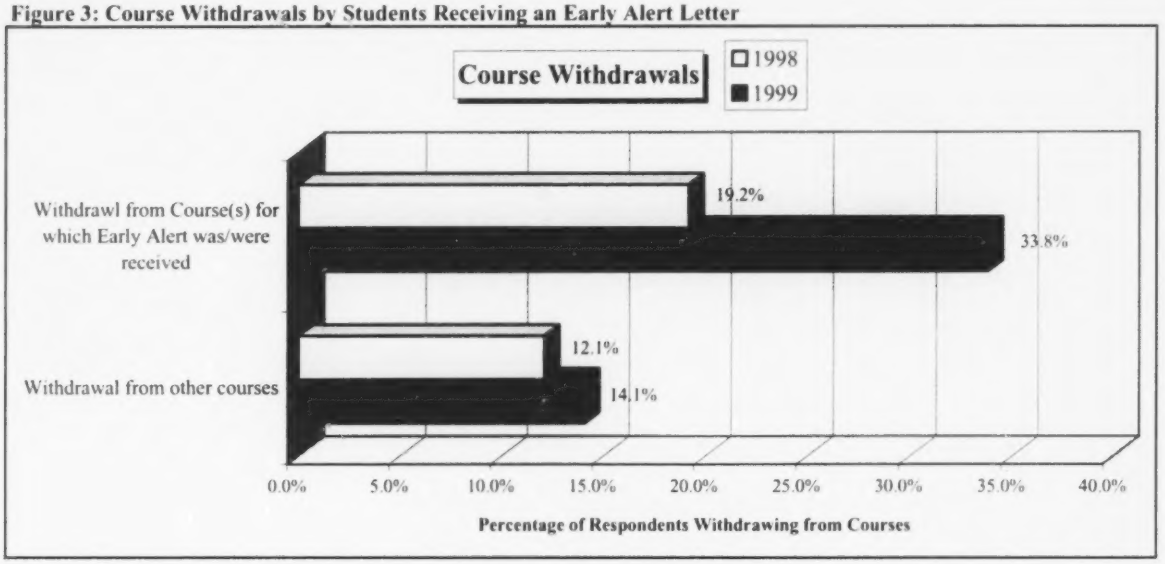
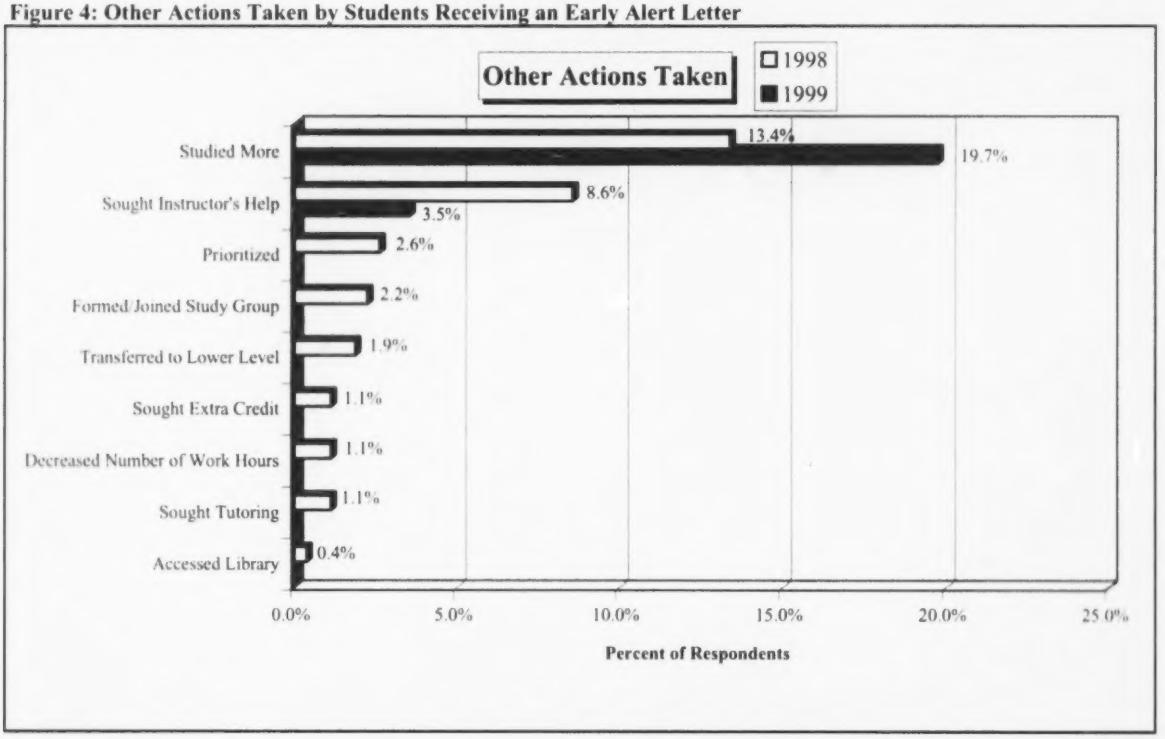


Figure 4: Other Actions Taken by Students Receiving an Early Alert Letter



EARLY ALERT SURVEY (1998 vs 1999)

Section 4: Timing and Utility of the Early Alert Program

Figure 5 below illustrates students' perceptions of the appropriateness of the time (within the semester) that the Early Alert letters are sent. In 1999, a substantially greater percentage of respondents (70.5% vs 51.8%) felt the timing of the Early Alert letters was appropriate.

Timing of the Early Alert Letters

This final section of the survey examined both the appropriateness of the timing of the Early Alert letter (within a semester) and its overall utility in the eyes of students receiving the Early Alert letter.

Utility of the Early Alert Program

The final question within the fourth section of the survey asked students to rate the utility of the Early Alert process. Comparative data are provided for 1998 and 1999 (Figure 6 below). In 1999, respondents rated the utility of the Early Alert program as higher than did respondents in 1998. A resounding 83% of respondents in 1999, compared to 72% in 1998, felt that the Early Alert program was at least somewhat useful. Similarly, the percentage of respondents who felt that the Early Alert program offered little value, decreased from nearly 16% in 1998 to only 10% in 1999.

Figure 5: Timing of the Early Alert Letters

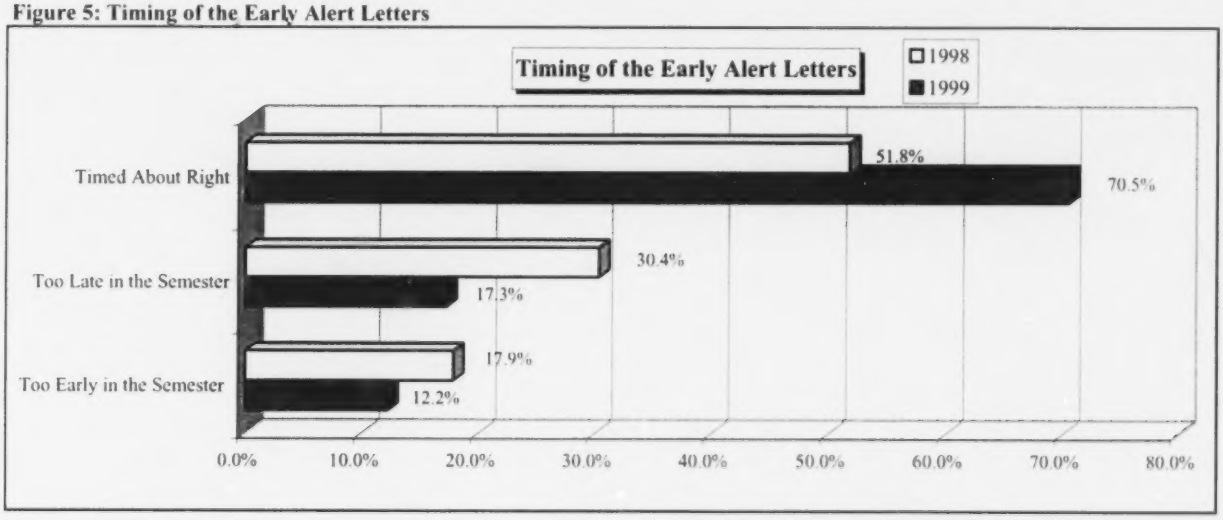
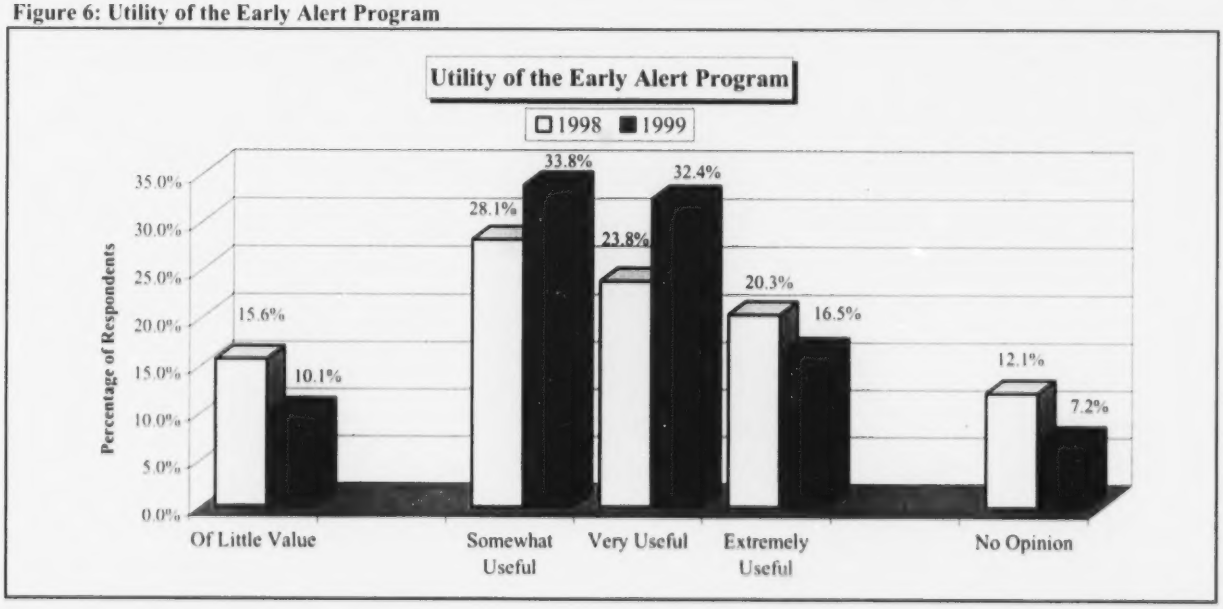


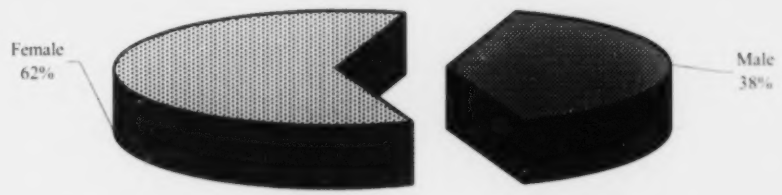
Figure 6: Utility of the Early Alert Program



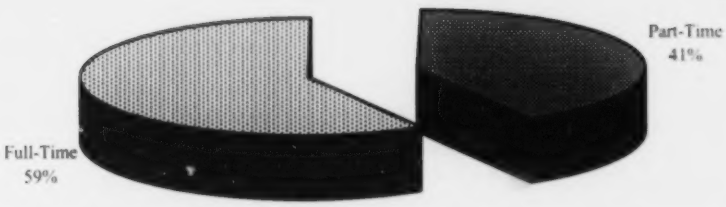
EARLY ALERT SURVEY (1998 vs 1999)

Demography of Respondents (1999)

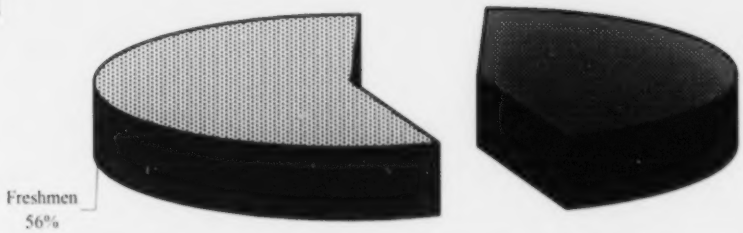
Gender



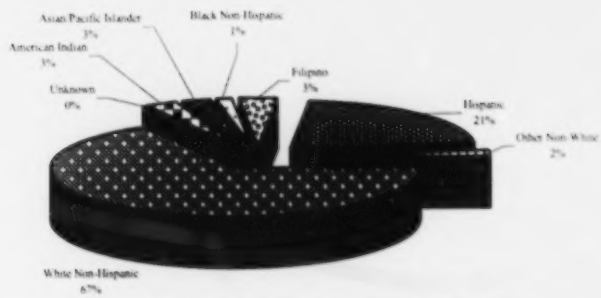
Course Load



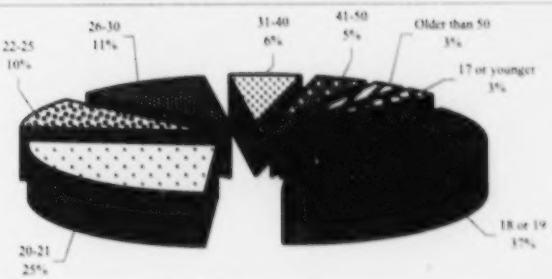
Student Level



Ethnicity



Age



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APPENDIX 1: Background of the Early Alert Program

As a result of legislation involving its Matriculation program, Cuesta College began collecting information on students experiencing academic difficulty during the spring semester of 1992. This program was called "Early Alert" because it was designed to notify students of potential problems after the first six (6) weeks of instruction in each 17-week semester.

The Early Alert process begins when the student's classroom instructor notifies the Matriculation staff of a student's substandard academic performance (test or quiz scores, poor attendance, missing assignments, etc.) during the first six weeks of instruction. A computer-generated letter usually arrives at the student's home during the eighth week of instruction four weeks before the final date for course withdrawal.

What is remarkable about the statistical results gathered since 1992 is their consistency over time. As a result of this consistency, it is possible to provide a "profile" of the type of student who is most likely to receive and Early Alert warning letter.

Generally speaking, one student in four (1 in 4) or about 25% of each semester's enrollment will receive an Early Alert letter in any given semester. What is of interest is that some student populations consistently receive disproportionately more (or less) letters. For example, younger students (ages 18 to 19) will receive a disproportionately higher percentage of Early Alert letters -- nearly 40% of their age group population receive letters. On the other hand, only about 15% of the older students (at least 26 years old) generally receive Early Alert letters.

When considering gender, the data across 11 consecutive semesters indicate that over 30% of the male students receive Early Alert letters while fewer than 25% of the female students do likewise.

New students (first-time freshmen) average 35% of their population receiving Early Alert letters, while sophomores (those who have completed 30 or more units) average only 20%.

Finally, differences in ethnic groups are also obvious. The percentage of white students receiving Early Alert letters approximates the overall college average (between 25% and 28% depending on the semester under study). On the other hand, generally speaking, around 40% of the black students enrolled receive Early Alert letters. The other major ethnic groups fall somewhere in between -- for example, the Hispanic group averages just under 35%.

Early Alert Survey

To award the free parking pass (to the lucky winner) we need your Social Security Number ___ ___ ___ - ___ ___ - ___ ___ ___ ___

As a result of receiving an Early Alert letter, which of the following services, if any, did you use?

		Yes		No
1.	None to date (If none, go directly to question 14.)	☐	☐	☐
2.	Met with Instructor(s)	☐	☐	☐
3.	Visited Counseling	☐	☐	☐
4.	Used Learning Skills Lab	☐	☐	☐
5.	Used Math Lab	☐	☐	☐
6.	Used Tutorial Center	☐	☐	☐
7.	Used Writing Center	☐	☐	☐

Were the services that you employed easy to use?

		Extremely difficult to use	Difficult to use	No opinion	Easy to use	Extremely easy to use
8.	Meeting with Instructor(s)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
9.	Counseling	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10.	Learning Skills Lab	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
11.	Math Lab	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
12.	Tutorial Center	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
13.	Writing Center	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

As a result of receiving an Early Alert letter, which of the following additional actions did you take?

14. Withdrawal from course(s) for which Early Alert was/were received.
☐ Yes ☐ No

15. Withdrawal from other course(s) to concentrate on class(es) for which Early Alert was/were received.
☐ Yes ☐ No

16. Other Action (Please specify)

_____

How useful is Early Alert?

17. To be of the greatest help to you, how was the timing of the Early Alert letter?
☐ Too Early in the Semester ☐ Too Late in the Semester ☐ Timed About Right

18. How useful was the Early Alert letter to you?
☐ Of Little Value ☐ Somewhat Useful ☐ Extremely Useful
☐ No Opinion ☐ Very Useful

Do you have any comments on the Early Alert process? (Please write on back.)

PLEASE DO NOT FOLD THIS SURVEY

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